

# Article

## Editorial

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# editorial

## Guest editors

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As Guest Editors of this Special Edition of the *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, we are delighted to be introducing this issue. This Special Issue on *Domestic Violence: New Directions in Policy and Practice in Europe* is particularly timely in the context of contemporary changes, challenges and achievements for feminist research and activism to end gender-based violence. This is rather a sombre time for tackling domestic violence in Europe (though, ‘When has it not been so?’, we hear you ask). We are seeing a backlash spreading slowly but surely across Europe. The Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) which came into force on 1 August 2014, filled us all with such hope for better things to come. It is the first legally binding convention on Violence against Women, emphasising the four pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and integrated policies, and providing us with a comprehensive guide to prevent and combat violence against women across Europe and beyond. Sadly, this is now being used by some countries to redefine domestic violence as ‘family violence’, completely obliterating the gendered reality that is domestic violence. The previously uncontroversial understanding of ‘gender’ in the Convention is now being used to deflect from the original aim of protecting women from violence by men. The Istanbul Convention itself (and not the violence it seeks to prevent and combat) is being seen as a radical threat to sexuality, family life and education.

Notwithstanding, this special issue has managed to collect a number of hopeful articles. The second European Conference on Domestic Violence (ECDV) held in Porto in 2017 was the original stimulus for this collection, with this issue being published leading up to the next ECDV conference in Oslo, in September 2019. The 2017 ECDV conference brought together academics, practitioners, activists from all over Europe (and beyond), and included many excellent presentations. Hence it was agreed to try to capture some of these in print, and voila! Here it is!

At the ECDV conference, while the difficulties and realities we are facing in this sector were clearly enunciated, the strength of the resistance to these was also clearly felt. And indeed, it must be said, that positive developments are also occurring. On the whole, the countries being monitored for their adherence to the Istanbul Convention

by the Groups of Experts on Action on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), have appreciated the evaluation of their situation and many of the recommendations being made in this regard. New services, new opportunities for funding, new laws and policies, increased awareness of the importance of prevention – all these and more are to be found in various European countries. Indeed, this is what this special issue is about, new developments in policy and practice in Europe. Necessity is the mother of invention; with every new difficulty, we seek to find a new solution. Every time a new barrier is placed before us, we find ways to circumvent, or climb over it. For this to happen, we need everyone on board; we need researchers/ academics, we need practitioners and policymakers, we need activists. And many of us are several of these rolled into one.

There are a number of both European-wide and country-specific centres or entities that specialise in carrying out research on violence against women, gender-based violence and domestic violence. Some are more generic, but also include this area, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) which are EU entities and therefore funded by the EU. While they have their own staff, they also pull in (generally) European specialists, who may include academics, practitioners, policymakers and activists, as consultants. National centres are often based in universities or other centres of higher education, and these often have to rely on project funding to enable them to carry out their research.

Similarly, in the activist area, there are European-wide entities, such as the Women against Violence Europe network (WAVE) and the European Women's Lobby (EWL), as well as smaller national entities all over Europe. Funding for these bodies is often more precarious, and as such they are more easily affected by backlash in their countries or regions. At the moment some of these are in danger of being closed due to the hostile context within which they operate. But always there is resilience and resistance.

It is against this backdrop that we present this special issue. We need to be able to acknowledge and celebrate our opportunities and gains in the sector, as well as acknowledge and resist the challenges and difficulties, while finding new ways of thinking about, responding to and implementing strategies to end gender-based violence, including domestic violence. In keeping with the innovations in method, analysis and critically reflexive argument promoted by the *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, the papers in this collection bring new thinking about issues old and new.

Feminist activism against gender-based violence has brought substantial changes to access to justice and support services for adult victims/survivors and children particularly over the last four decades and most recently since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and action on this taken by individual nation states. The first paper in this Special Issue provides an overview and analysis of the different models of comprehensive intervention that have developed in response to domestic violence in Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, England and Wales. Drawing on research conducted over several years, Carol Hagemann-White identifies contextual and cultural differences within intervention approaches, particularly in the weight of emphasis given to victim protection and the criminalisation of domestic violence offenders. In most contexts there have been efforts to bring about whole system change and improve multi-sector coordinated responses with a reliance on legislation and best practice guidance to provide the enabling framework. By itself, we know that legislation is not enough and it takes time, organisational and cultural changes

in practice and behaviours, commitment and resources for change to happen. Even where there is agreement over the content of laws needed, Hagemann-White points out that there are differences that exist across different national contexts that influence implementation, especially differences in how organisations operate, how they exercise discretion, comply with norms and procedures, share information and monitor impact. The different approaches all raise questions about how well interventions in these different systems meet the needs of domestic violence survivors and children. Hagemann-White argues that rather than fixing standards of good practice, the dialogue between diverse systems and agencies needs to reflect on basic principles, the goals, outcomes and ethical issues raised in different contexts in comprehensively responding to domestic violence. Without a central focus on victim/survivor rights and empowerment both criminalisation and victim protection approaches within national system responses are seen to have limited potential to stop perpetrators and ultimately to prevent domestic violence.

The Istanbul Convention covers women and girls, from any background, regardless of their age, race, religion, social origin, association with a national minority, migrant status or sexual orientation, and further recognises that there are groups of women and girls who are often at greater risk of experiencing violence. States need to ensure that their specific needs are taken into account. In keeping with this, the next three papers consider new approaches from Europe to address previously unrecognised or marginalised needs. Lyndsey Harris pursues the theme of holding a central focus on the survivor/victim in her article on services for women with ‘complex needs’, women who too often are unable to access appropriate help or support because they are seen as being ‘too difficult to help’. Drawing on the qualitative research findings from a mixed methods evaluation study of the *Response to Complexity* (R2C) programme in England, Harris’s study delivers a hopeful message about the scope for real, life-saving changes to come from this approach to trauma informed, specialist ‘wrap around’ multi-agency care, even in the context where doing more for less remains a major driver for service innovation.

Writing about developments in Germany, Regina-Maria Dackweiler, Franziska Peters and Angela Merkle consider an important gap in research knowledge on accessible and appropriate support for older victims/survivors of domestic violence. In many countries, formal sources of support and advice for survivors/victims of domestic violence are not accessible and often not relevant for the specific needs of older people. Dackweiler, Peters and Merkle argue that ‘volunteer guides’ who provide home-based, low level, generic support and are trained to identify and support survivors/victims of domestic violence, have scope to bring reliable, relevant and innovative new services to address this gap in provision. Focus groups and individual interviews with volunteer guides, professionals working with survivors/victims, service coordinators and researchers, however, showed varied and conflicting views about the appropriateness of training volunteers in supporting older people experiencing domestic violence. In the current climate of the personalisation of responsibility for social welfare in Germany and other European states, Dackweiler, Peters and Merkle suggest that we could reconsider longstanding debates in feminism about specialist service professionalisation, peer support and the role of volunteers in community action against gender-based violence.

Lisa ReNae Muftić, Susan Hoppe and Jonathan Grubb discuss the help-seeking strategies used by women victims/survivors of domestic violence in the post-conflict

context of Bosnia-Herzegovina where the availability of refuges has grown from just one set up during the war in the early 1990s, to nine by 2014. From a survey of 107 women living in refuges in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Muftić, Hoppe and Grubb identify the main coping and help-seeking strategies women had previously employed. Similarities and some differences are found between women's use of safety planning and other coping/survival strategies in this post-conflict context compared with strategies found from research with women victims/survivors in non-conflict contexts such as the USA. Muftić, Hoppe and Grubb propose that their study findings could be used to inform safety planning approaches for specialist domestic violence services in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In the field of prevention, apart from running awareness-raising campaigns, the Istanbul Convention talks about tackling attitudes, prejudices, gender roles and stereotypes and the importance of actively engaging men and boys. It is now widely accepted that eliminating gender-based violence will indeed require concerted and sustained commitments for prevention to change the norms, attitudes, systemic and structural inequalities that interact to sustain the conditions in which gender inequalities thrive. The next three papers address, in different ways, issues concerning prevention. Evaluating the implementation of a pioneering bystander programme addressing domestic violence prevention in the community is the focus of the article by Rachel Fenton, Cassandra Jones, Sue Moss and Kate Cooke. Up to now, most bystander prevention programmes have been designed for students in university campus settings. Fenton, Jones, Moss and Cooke adapted the English university campus-based bystander intervention for intimate partner sexual and domestic violence to field test and implement a bystander programme to prevent domestic violence in the wider community. Working in partnership with practitioners in the community, Fenton and colleagues reflect on their learning about the meaning of concepts essential in bystander programme implementation, such as 'community', 'community readiness for prevention' as well as critically considering the safety in a wider community context of how to go about 'challenging' the norms and attitudes that support domestic violence against women.

Janet Bowstead returns to the *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* with a second article, also addressing prevention, albeit less directly, and with a greater focus on methodology. The article maps the journeys of women on the move, women escaping and relocating as a result of domestic violence. Bowstead uses anonymised administrative data to analyse the 140,000 relocation journeys and transience of women before and after fleeing domestic violence across England and Wales. Bowstead's article details her methodology to analyse the data and to visually map the spatial churn of women victims/survivors across England and Wales, often across regions, across local authority boundaries and across countries. Her detailed account of this innovative methodology and the findings has relevance for data monitoring and analysis beyond the UK and has huge potential to inform prevention work and service planning at national, regional and local levels of governance.

Prevention is also a theme in the final paper in this Special Issue, in the Policy and Practice section. Marian Duggan reflects on the preventive impact of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) in England and Wales following the murder of Claire Wood, killed by her former partner, George Appleton, in 2009. This policy analysis draws on empirical research into the DVDS in terms of its national and local operation and finds that it may be difficult to access, and may be deflecting rather

than preventing harm. The paper makes recommendations for improvement in order to enhance the policy's efficacy.

And that completes our overview of this special issue. We hope that you will find it both useful and enjoyable, and that it will help you to continue to resist and challenge barriers that we encounter in our fight against gender-based violence.